

Using *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations* to improve presentation skills

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<http://www.ease.ac.uk>

Product type: Interactive academic English on CD-ROM

Language: English (British)

Level: intermediate to upper level

Operating system: Windows 2000 and Window XP

Hardware requirements: Pentium III Processor or better, 128MB RAM or better,
1024x768 screen resolution or higher, 16 bit colour or better, Mouse, Sound card

Price: Single user licence (£40), 5 user licence (£80), 20 user licence (£200) 100 user
licence (£650)

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Introduction

The computer may be considered as a relatively supplemental tool for Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL). Using computers may enhance and enrich language teaching and learning, and may also make language learning more attractive. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of the use of computers in ESL/EFL, and many findings and evidence provide positive evaluation for this field (see Warschauer and Healey, 1998, Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg, 2003 and Chapelle, 2003). With the increasing variety of software and online programs in the field, and the increasing speed of broadband available, there has recently emerged interest in the ways in which the computer is used to support language learners to practise their listening and speaking skills. As Slater and Varney-Burch (2001) state, computers are used to support

listening skills. Interestingly, computers are also used for oral practice (Hegelheimer and Tower, 2004). More importantly, computers allow students to work at their own pace to practise their speaking skills and correct their own errors without worrying about making mistakes, which is an important factor for language learning (e.g. Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg, 2003). With the development of new technologies, more computer programs have been produced in the area of TESL/TEFL. *EASE* programs produced by University of Warwick, UK, are one of them for ESL learners to improve their English skills.

Overview

Essential Academic Skills in English (*EASE*, CELTE, University of Warwick) is a series of interactive CD-ROMs for English learners to develop their listening and speaking skills in an academic situation. *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations* is the second program in *EASE* series. Created for non-native speakers, in particular for those who come to study in a university, it is a self-study program that is easy to use and intended to help students develop speaking skills in giving presentations in English for academic purposes in their university studies.

Description

EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations provides spontaneous academic presentations, based on digital video recordings of seminar presentations at a university in the UK. Topics include Social Science, Science and Humanities. Presentations are given by teachers and students including good and bad samples, so that students can develop their own presentation skills in an academic context from the good samples, and, at the same time, avoid following the bad samples. Figure 1 shows that a student is giving a presentation drawing on East Asian Studies.



Figure 1 A presentation given by a student in *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations*

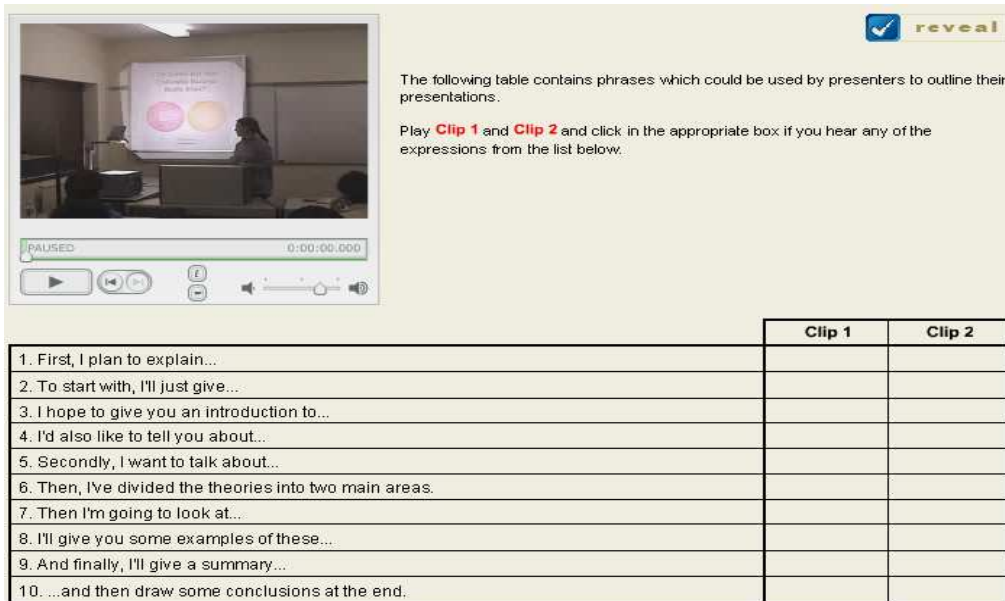
Learners can also use some vocabulary and phrases used in good samples of the presentations given by teachers or students. Learners can click to listen and watch the video clips of authentic presentations, and complete exercises, such as multiple choice questions (MCQs) and note-taking to learn how to improve their own presentations in English in academic situations. Learners click the 'reveal' button to receive the correct answers for the exercises. In this way, learners develop phrases and structures in their own presentations.

There are five units in *Seminar Skills 1: Presentation*, including Introduction to seminars and interviews with seminar leaders and students, Seminar presentation, Using visual aids in seminar presentation, Organisational signals, and Speaking appropriately in an academic context.

There are different sections in each unit. The majority of sections allow students to listen to some examples of presentations, select the correct answers and develop skills of giving an academic presentation. For example, in Section 2 of Unit 2, learners listen to presentations and choose the correct answers to evaluate students' presentations. In Section 4, students can listen to some presentations and complete MCQs for different types of presentations, from formal to informal samples.

Unit 4 offers phrases and sentences to use at the beginning of a presentation, or to outline the presentation, or to move from one part of the presentation to the next part in presentations. For example, in Seminar presentation, learners listen to presentations given

by students and then explore ways they outlined those presentation. Common phrases used by presenters are listed, such as: “In this talk, I’m going to discuss...” or “To begin this lecture” for use at the beginning of a presentation. Similarly, they might learn phrases for the outline, for example, “First, I plan to explain.... Secondly, Then, and Finally”. Learners select which phrase was used to start, move the program forward, and end. Figure 2 below shows the example of a MCQs task which focuses on the organization of presentations. Students need to click which expressions they hear and watch from the presentations on the two video clips. These tasks encourage a focus on giving an academic presentation. The purpose of the tasks in this section is to help students learn how to start, move and conclude a presentation.



The following table contains phrases which could be used by presenters to outline their presentations.


Play **Clip 1** and **Clip 2** and click in the appropriate box if you hear any of the expressions from the list below.


	Clip 1	Clip 2
1. First, I plan to explain...		
2. To start with, I'll just give...		
3. I hope to give you an introduction to...		
4. I'd also like to tell you about...		
5. Secondly, I want to talk about...		
6. Then, I've divided the theories into two main areas.		
7. Then I'm going to look at...		
8. I'll give you some examples of these...		
9. And finally, I'll give a summary...		
10. ...and then draw some conclusions at the end.		

Figure 2 An example of a MCQs task in *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations*.

In Organisational signals, learners can also learn other phrases for providing details at various stages in presentations. For instance, at the beginning of the presentation, students say: “In this talk, I’m going to discuss...”, or “I will argue that...” and “My aim is to show....” Figure 3 illustrates the example of organisational skills in presentations.

Seminar Skills 1: Organisational Signals





In the following clip the student goes into great detail about the various stages of his presentation.

Look at the following phrases listed below.

Play the video clip and tick the phrases you hear.

STREAMING 0:00:08.960

⏸ ⏪ ⏩ 🔊 🔇

1. My presentation will be divided into two parts...	
2. Firstly, I want to...	
3. In the first part I will examine...	
4. I will argue that...	
5. In the next section...	
6. ...the second part will be based on...	
7. My aim is to show you...	

Figure 3 Samples of organisational signals in presentations in *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations*

The instant feedback can help students to understand the presentations and develop their phrases and structures in their own presentations. After listening to the samples of the presentation, students are provided with opportunities to learn to give good presentations helped by using the same phrases.

Students can also complete repetition tasks with these samples of presentations to practise their speaking skills in giving presentations, which may be helpful in developing speaking skills. According to Yule *et al.* (1992) and Bygate *et al.* (2001), task repetition can help learners to improve the expression of their meanings and promote interactive efficiency. After learning key phrases and strategies from these samples, students can give their own presentations to improve their speaking skills.

Evaluation

A strong positive aspect of this program is that it provides authentic samples of student presentations, which deal with the negative and positive aspects of presentations. Through samples of various presentations on the computer, students can learn ways to give an effective presentation and avoid mistakes. It is helpful for students to develop their presentation skills in academic situations by listening to and watching these samples

on the computer. As Ellis (2003) suggests, samples of language are helpful for learners to learn the second language. Through samples of good and bad presentations in this program, students can learn how to give a good presentation and avoid bad presentations. With the samples of some phrases and frame work used in academic presentation, such as how to begin, how to go to the next part and how to end the presentation, students can produce their own good presentations..

This 'real' language use in 'real' situations helps students to adopt good strategies to be applied in their own presentations. Students also increase their academic vocabulary through listening to materials in the program. In addition, listening to these sources is relevant to authenticity in the respects of language teaching and learning. Authenticity is a useful aspect for students in second language learning because students normally respond well to sources and tasks which draw on 'real-life' in their language learning. As Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Chapelle (2001) suggest, authenticity is important for second language acquisition and can keep students' interest and enable students to develop their willingness to communicate. Authenticity can encourage students' enthusiasm in the tasks. The genuine sources or tasks can promote students' interest and motivate them in their second language learning (Lee, 1995). The implication, therefore, is that language teachers need to provide students with experiences as real as possible and to that they use real materials and tasks. And this is where *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations* is really able to help. At the same time, students listened to the materials in the program for academic purposes they need in future, thus suggesting that students can be motivated to listen to them and practise their skills in giving academic presentations. It is believed that the programme may have given students more confidence in their spoken English.

However, it is to be noted that the 'conditions' and 'tasks' are not authentic in terms of the demands of lectures and seminars during an academic programme of study. They can only ever be approximations. Further, the programme may not cover all subjects and may not particularly correspond with students' specific academic course. For example, lectures on geography are genuine for students whose subject is geography, but not authentic for students whose subject is chemistry. Despite this, the styles and structures of lectures are still likely to be echoed in students' own subjects. Moreover, the

programme cannot evaluate students' product through, for example, providing feedback to students' presentations. Students still rely on evaluation by themselves, or from teachers or peers.

Recommendation

EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations is definitely useful for intermediate to upper level learners to improve their speaking skills in giving presentations in an academic environment. It is suitable for self-study as well as classroom teaching. It is an excellent supplement for English courses and can increase student confidence in giving their own academic presentations.

Meanwhile, if *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations* provides a recording system, it could increase its strength because this can promote speaking skills by comparing learners' own recording and the original ones (see, for example, Slater and Varney-Burch, 2001 and Hegelheimer and Tower, 2004). In Zou's (2007) study, he found that several teachers asked students to use a recording system in computers to record their presentations when they used *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations* in ESL course. Both teachers and students reported that it was helpful for students to record their presentations and compare with the original ones in order to improve their presentation skills more efficiently. Therefore, language teachers can ask learners to use the recording system in the computer or other recording software to complete recording tasks. Both the teacher and learners themselves can compare the recording work with original voice. Then, the benefit and outcome of using the program may increase.

More importantly, there is limited interaction with people and students may feel isolated when they work on the computer program individually. As Bransford *et al.* (1999) and Coomey Stephenson (2001) assert, students still need interaction with teachers or peers. The computer alone cannot lead to good teaching and learning (Alexander and McKenzie, 1998 and Higginson, 2000). Zou (2007) also argues that the teacher's role is still crucial in using the computer programs for learners to develop their speaking skills. Students still need feedback from and have interaction with the teacher. The teacher cannot leave students work alone on the computer all the time.

Thus, the teacher still needs to provide opportunities for students to interact with peers or the teacher. Either the teacher or peers require offering feedback or evaluation to students' presentations after they have learned strategies in giving presentations from the programme. If so, students will be able to obtain more benefits from using *EASE: Seminar Skills 1: Presentations*. For example, language teachers may firstly ask language learners to listen to the presentations included in this program and complete tasks independently. Teachers then can ask students to record their presentations on computers and compare with the original presentations in the program. Teachers can ask students to record in pairs and ask them to listen to and check for each other. Teachers can also listen to their recording and provide feedback directly in the class or after class. Additionally, teachers can ask students to give presentations in class after their individual work on the computer and evaluate their language product in class.

Accordingly, teachers should offer extra tasks to make the content accessible to the students to improve their language learning. All these extra tasks will help learners develop their speaking skills and motivate them to work on computers effectively. Without teachers' support and interaction with people, the effect of using the computer program in second language teaching and learning may be impaired.

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